The Brave and Handsome Highway Man

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The Brave and Handsome Highway Man

by Moonstruckidiot

Summary

Will is a 17th century blacksmith, he should be a highly respected member of the local community but instead due to his "gift" of empathy many regard him as a witch and he does not get the work his mastery of the craft deserves. In order to achieve his dream of owning a piece of land he takes to the road as a Highway man. One night he holds up the new Justice of the Peace, a Hannibal Lecter and his companion Lady Bedelia Du Maurier, which sets in motion a chain of events which could lead Will to an end common enough for a highway man, the gallows. As unlikely as it may seem, after Hannibal visits the local blacksmith, the two men become friends. Can Hannibal save Will from a fate many locals and the blacksmith himself have always seen as inevitable.
edited 21/5/16
This was meant to be light hearted and fluffy and there is lots of fluff, sassiness and flirting, but when I thought that Will would likely be viewed as a witch and the likely consequences of that, this ended up a bit more serious than intended - Chapter nine is still fluffy though

Notes

So in 17th Century England the average life expectancy was 35, if you survived to 30 you could live to 60ish, but its quite a big if. Something like 40% of children died so hence the low life expectancy. So as for this fic I have reduced the age of Will to 28 and Hannibal to 38, this aids the story especially if I do a continuation.
In 17th Century England people were small (apparently our medieval ancestors were nearly as tall as us then they reached a new low!!! in the 17th Century) so average height for men was 66inches, 5ft 6, 1.68metres - Will is taller at by 2inches and Hannibal by 4 inches - I could not keep them at Hugh and Mads actual height as everyone would know Will was the Highway man. I think I might be taking this too seriously.
17th century England included a decade of civil war, the beheading of a king, witch scares and hangings, plague, the great fire of London, three Anglo-Dutch wars. I am not a historian I googled. But it sounds like an angsty time to me.
No beta,
I might end up just writing the whole thing and posting it in one go rather than as chapters, I'm not sure at the moment

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

There is a biting chill to the night air one that a few layers of clothing does little to prevent penetrating right down to the marrow especially if, as Will Graham is, you are sat stock still. Any right minded person would be indoors near the fire or at least warming themselves with a pint of ale or two, but then many would say Will was not right in head. The tip of his nose and his cheeks have turned pink and his toes, shoved into a pair of black leather calf length boots, are edging towards numb but Will doesn't notice. A little discomfort is common place for him and he's enough nervous energy to generate a fevered kind of warmth which makes his armpits and lower back damp. He breathes out loudly, there is no one to hear him just Dolly his mare and the nocturnal creatures of the wood who from their barking, grunting and scurrying have better things to do like hunt and fuck. Leaning forward in his saddle he gently strokes the horse's long neck and whispers soothingly, "Don't worry Dolly this will be our last one for this year." She's a trusty, sweet natured thing too good to be used for these night time outings, he fears one day she'll be hurt.

The horse and rider wait patiently, one of the shadows of the wood, for the sound of carriage wheels and hooves. From where Will is sat at the edge of the tree line he can see the glint of stars in a cloudless sky, to him they are a marvel of God's creation, beautiful and also useful, sailors use them to navigate by. He idly wonders how they got their names, something to do with the Greeks, that's more than most village men could tell you, but he would like to know more. After some time he hears the distant sound of grinding stones and dull rumblings as the carriage makes the slow, hazardous journey up the hill. The road is not much wider than the wheeled vehicle and on either side ruts three feet deep wait the wheels of any driver who does not have his wits about him. Soon rusted autumn leaves will mix with rain making the local roads impassable for several months, so this could be Wills last chance of a good purse this year.

He'd heard about these incomers from the local gossipmongers, with his interest peaked he'd scouted out the small manor house where they have taken up residence. There was a man and a woman, they made a fine twosome in clothing too fancy for these parts; not even the local lord wore anything so expensive looking. The Gentleman, a tall man, older than Will by roughly a decade, had hired a local, a good driver when sober, on retainer to drive his carriage. From Will's observations there appeared to be no servants which is unusual, the man could certainly afford them, its a possibility some of the local young men and women will find employment with him soon. He knows it would be wise for any one planning robbery to attempt it before the couple is accompanied on their outings by armed servants.

So when ale has loosened the tongue of the driver and the Gentleman's travel plans have become well known Will decides to finally welcome the new Justice of the Peace to the area. Will doesn't makes a habit of robbery, in truth he finds it distasteful, he sees who they, his victims, are. Peeling back their clothing, their skin, their bone, he sees their souls. He enjoys the unravelling but what is revealed is almost without exception banal. There is a power in it though the sort of power which makes locals believe he's a witch. Sometimes, when he's had enough of people, which is most of the time, he thinks it's a shame he isn't because rather

than wait on a dark, lonely road for some unfortunate travellers he could magic up some gold and be tossing another log on a fire instead.

Part of him likes it when they are afraid, he can imagine killing the odious ones, the ones who beat their wives and enslave their servants and it's this feeling which gives him nightmares because he's not sure if it belongs to the Highway man he slips into to commit robbery, someone else he has unwittingly absorbed or, worst of all, if its all him. He runs a finger around his collar, this is not the sort of attire Will feels comfortable in its too tight, and too elegant, although nothing as elegant as the man he's about to hold up. The ruffled shirt, embroidered waistcoat and long frockcoat make him feel bound, he prefers the simple clothing he wears in his smithy. The Highway man though wants to put on a show, so Will stops fiddling with the loose button on his coat, carefully feels along the underneath of his white wig tucking in a stray curl then straightens his hat, after all it wouldn't do to look dishevelled in front of this well dressed pair.

He closes his eyes shutting out the stars. He sheds layer after layer, every hair, every inch, every wrinkle, every sin, every hurt which has attached to his adult self.

Will is a beardless boy looking up at a man towering over him, time has obscured the face but the voice is clear, "What do you want to be when you grow up, boy."

Dazzled by tales of adventure and perhaps wanting to emulate the man who is unfailingly kind to him, an innocent child replies, "a Highway man, Sir."

Somewhere in a shadowed corner of Will's mind his father speaks, "The lad is a half wit he can't look folk in the face how is he supposed to rob them."

"He's cleverer than you or I, he just sees things differently." It's the unusualness of this, of being defended, which makes this man and this memory take up residence in the huts of Will's mind.

"I dare say he does, but thinking different gets people hung" Will feels but isn't sure that his father's words were touched with sadness.

The Highway man, was neither cruel nor a brute, but bold, fearless and most who dared look him in the eye knew he would not back down if challenged. Mostly though his manner was charming enough so he got what he wanted without too much fuss. This is the man Will slips into on those rough, lonely roads, it is he whose hand draws up a scarf leaving visible only a set of fine blue eyes which in the light afforded by the waxing moon look more grey. Dolly knows what to do next she takes her rider forward to stand in the middle of the road. It is conceivable that the driver, being only faced with one man, may try and run the Highway man down but its much more likely that fearing for his own skin he will bring the carriage to a stop. The Highway man breathes, heart beat slowing, the weight of the weapons feel good in his hands, he raises one pistol level with the horses and the other with the driver. These hands are those of a man well practiced and sure of himself. Eyes and mind converge and focus, he calls out into the night, "Stand and Deliver."

Then with a confidence not seen in Will Graham the figure dressed in black dismounts and takes long strides towards the carriage.

“Down” he shouts to the driver, “kneel, hands behind head.”

The carriage door opens and the new Justice of the Peace climbs down he doesn’t look at the Highway man but instead turns and offers his hand to a petite blond lady who is currently descending steps with the restricting rustle of skirts. A third person is just visible behind the lady, a girl of about sixteen, under his scarf Will grimaces he doesn’t like it when young ones are involved, they can get too emotional.

“Sir, kneel, hands behind your head,” he orders the Gentleman, who, looking at the damp ground beneath him, slowly and not without a trace of disgust on his face, sinks to his knees. The man is quiet, issuing no grumbles or threats, if anything he seems more preoccupied with not getting his breeches dirty than either in fear of his life or annoyed at the inconvenience. The Highway man should be offended but Will is more bemused.

Keeping a gun aimed at the Gentleman the Highway man turns his attention to the blond lady, he allows her to stand to do otherwise would not be chivalrous, but he does run his eyes over her appraisingly, concluding, “Madam, you are beautiful enough you are in no need of the jewels around your neck.”

“I’ll see you swing for this,” she hisses as she all but throws her necklace and bracelet into the dirt near the Highway man’s boots. Will tucks one gun into his belt, then whilst keeping his eyes firmly on the lady picks up the Jewels.

The fine lady before Will isn’t flattered by a gallant Highway man nor afraid of a gun, there isn’t an ounce of fear in her bearing, her voice or her eyes, she’s more patient tigress than spoilt house cat. For all the emotional restraint breed into high born ladies fear will show through, even if its just in the tremor of fingers or the biting of a lip and here there is nothing. He’s in no doubt if there was a sword within reach she’d probably pick it up and give him a good fight for his money, or her jewels in this case. She probably restrains herself for the sake of appearances in front of the young woman with her, the man though he knows what she is. Will can see the Gentleman is something else entirely, much more than the dandy he first appears. He’d probably just stand and watch as they fought and not help his wife, Will queries at that, no, not his wife, his lover, again that’s not quite right. Whoever she is to the Gentleman it makes no difference, Will is sure he wouldn’t aid her, even though he’s certainly could. He would help the young one though.

“An occupational hazard My Lady,” Will replies after a moment or two lost in thought.

“But,” Will adds, reading the curves of the lady’s lovely face as a fortune teller reads a palm, “I’ll say this if my neck feels the noose, yours will follow soon after, mark my words.”

“Here take this,” says the young woman holding out a gold chain and locket,

‘No, no, I don’t...’, and something of Will not the Highway man comes through. He doesn’t want to deprive her of her chain and locket but trembling fingers have already placed it around the hand holding the lady’s jewels.

Will puts the jewels in the a little leather pouch he carries then flicks the locket open with his free hand. Inside he can just make out a tiny drawing of a dark haired woman who bares more

than a passing resemblance to the girl. Will wants to return it, but the Highway man will not allow it, it would make him appear weak and he is keenly aware he is not the only predator on the road this night. This is why Will does not take to the roads often, he hates the confusion emotions can bring out in him and the danger it can present.

“My name is Hannibal and that is Abigail my ward,” Will pulls his stare from the girl to settle on the man addressing him, “if you let her go back inside the carriage with my lady friend I think she will calm herself.”

“Ladies, please return to your carriage, you can be on your way shortly.”

“Your purse sir,” he points the gun at the Gentleman who, from the gleam of his eyes and turn of his mouth, is most definitely finding something amusing.

“You will find I have nothing of value on my person.”

Will motions for the driver to search the man including the heels of his boots where valuables are often hidden in little compartments. Nothing is found, except a knife tucked away to his side, it’s well made and even though he doesn’t need it for some reason Will decides that he’ll take it. And with that it is done and Will rides off up the side of the wood and is gone along one of the many dirt tracks. No one pursues him and even if they did he knows the lie of the land much better than any outsider would.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Will hides his loot and we learn a little more about Abigail

its a short chapter, but important

Will follows paths etched in the landscape a hundred years ago by his forebears. As he takes the trail to the left its a good thing he hardly needs the light of the moon as the canopy of trees dampens down what little there is. He knows just where the trail skirts round the edge of a 50 foot drop before rising further upwards, the slope ever steeper. He knows when to turn to follow a narrow switchback, the horse and rider head up and up towards the more desolate landscapes of the moors. What few trees there are cling onto life against the battery of wind, the ground is densely covered by heather and bracken hiding an uneven surface, he dismounts, it would be easy enough for a man or a horse to turn their ankle. Will finds the trail, easily missed by someone who doesn't know its there, which leads down to a small cottage. Its the only house for several miles, the door hangs off its hinges repetitively banging against the frame, its not been inhabited for some time, twelve years to Wills reckoning.

No one comes here except Will, it's haunted or so they say by Mrs Hobbs who was stabbed to death by her deranged husband. Beating your wife is one thing but killing her and then yourself is another, the ground is cursed or so folk say. Will takes no notice of such superstitious nonsense, for him its a good place to stash his loot before he can make it over the hills to sell far away from where he lives. He takes out the tinder, striker and rock which he keeps in his pouch and sets a small fire in the grate then lights a candle. Objects from the domestic life once lived here still remain, including saucepans, and candlesticks Will's father made. Will has never taken anything, he just leaves what there is for nature to take in its own time. The kitchen table is not in bad shape and on top of it sits a small wooden doll Hobbs carved for his daughter; she, Abigail, was never found. Will sits himself down on a small stool by the fire and takes out the locket. The drawing is exquisite, its Mrs Hobbs for sure, capturing the gentleness of a woman who endured the harshness of life with a smile. The girl in the carriage, Abigail, looks a lot like Mrs Hobbs. Will takes the jewels from his pouch and puts them into a box he keeps right at the back of a old storage cupboard, then putting out the fire he exits but not before pocketing a small tin whistle.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The locket is returned and Bedelia and Hannibal have a chat

Hannibal sits on an armchair his legs lazily crossed over, from the tip of his right forefinger hangs a gold chain and locket, “It seems our Highway man has a conscience,” he says to Bedelia who is sat near a window reading, long blond hair loose about her face, a wine glass with a long twisted stem at her side.

She looks up, her eyes settle on the jewellery, she closes the book and places it on a small circular side table, “Where did you find it?”

“On the desk in my study.”

“He has walked uninvited through the halls and rooms of your home and yet,” Bedelia leans forward her eyes covering every inch of Hannibal’s face “I see no anger.”

“He left this as well,” and Hannibal holds up a beaten old whistle.

“A peculiar thing, what are you not telling me Hannibal?” she asks a frosted edge to each clearly spoken word.

“I think he knows who Abigail is.”

“Bringing her back here was a mistake, you need to rectify the situation.”

He shakes his head, turning the whistle over in his hand, “He doesn’t want to take her from us, from you Bedelia.”

“Ah, your intrigued, I almost pity the man. You’ll play one of your games, get bored and if he’s alive at the end of it he’ll wish he wasn’t. It would be simpler if he hung.”

“You know me well. Is it a suitable revenge for you my dear?” She takes a sip of wine and nods lightly as if she has just agreed the material for a new dress.

Turning her attention back to her book, Bedelia says quietly, “I’ll be leaving in the morning, I want to get away from this godforsaken place before the weather turns. I’ll be taking Abigail with me.” Its not Bedelia's decision to make, Abigail will remain with Hannibal if he so chooses but she's relying on a shift in his priorities to let the girl spend the winter in town where with any luck she'll find a suitable husband for her.

Hannibal enjoys Bedelia's company in and out of his bed, but neither she nor Abigail could participate fully in the chase and bringing down of his quarry, it is not suitable for the fair sex although admittedly both women have the potential to be deadly in their own way. So for now It would be best if both were gone.

Hannibal stands up from his chair intending to retire to his study, “I have to take Augustus to be shoed, I’ll do so in the morning after you both leave.”

Bedelia has her way and will leave knowing he will always come back to her, in acknowledgment of this she adds as he walks out the room, “you know where we are when your new toy loses its lustre.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Hannibal visits the blacksmiths and discovers a sweaty and sassy Will is exactly who he is looking for

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The smithy is a long, deep building made from local stone, its entrance is wide allowing light to penetrate into the room. The stone furnace is built into the wall to the left of the entrance and a window on the right wall ensures the area is well lit but not in direct sunlight. An assortment of tools including long tongs hang on the wall adjacent to the furnace, and some swords and knives also hang close by. A few newly made objects including a beautifully made fire stand sit on a long wooden table awaiting their owners. The Blacksmith is stood by his anvil with his back turned away from Hannibal and gives no acknowledgement of his presence. So Hannibal settles himself against a wall, watching as a long piece of metal, glowing a bright yellow-orange, is bent into shape. The Blacksmith is not what Hannibal expected he isn't brawny but slim and lithe with muscles as finely wrought as the metal work on display. Porcelain skin is tinged pink with work and heat, dark brown curls are tied back with a simple black ribbon, a shirt clings to the channel of the man's spine and for a moment Hannibal imagines the tip of his tongue catching a droplet of sweat before it is soaked up by trousers hugging a pert backside, which he can't help but notice flex's minutely with each hammer stroke. He's considering the worth of praying for the view of the front to be as blessed as the back when he is interrupted by a boy.

"Excuse me Sir, can I help you." A lad of about 18, handsome enough to have already broken a few local girls hearts, blocks his view.

"I have come to speak with the Blacksmith."

"I'm afraid he is busy, I'm his apprentice, if your horse needs shoeing I can do it."

Hannibal looks the apprentice up and down and he's amused to find the boy does the same; its not sexual more sizing up the enemy. "I can wait."

"He doesn't like being watched," there is an edge of challenge but Hannibal is feeling generous and doesn't take it up.

Offering instead a blunt edged smile he says, "I will be very quiet, he wont know I'm here," before turning his attention back to the Blacksmith.

The boy, obviously not one to be deterred, makes his way over to Hannibal's horse and tries to lift up one of its legs.

"I'll do it, Matthew." Hannibal only sees the side view of the Blacksmith who is making his way over to the horse but its enough that he has to catch himself before, 'beautiful' slips out.

Instead Hannibal comments, "Your fellow villagers don't seem to have a high opinion of you, they advised me to go to the Farrier in the next village along.' Hannibal often makes the acquaintance of the local Blacksmiths on his travels, they are invariably intelligent, capable men with enough common sense to make them more interesting then the local gentry. It puzzled Hannibal as to why he would be advised to avoid this Blacksmith unless the man is an imbecile, he's hoping that isn't the case. The lack of response to Hannibal's comment is however noted.

The dirt clinging to the Blacksmith doesn't stop Hannibal from offering his hand, 'I'm Hannibal Lecter, the new...'

"I know who you are, the new justice," Will looks at the outstretched hand and instead of taking it wipes the back of his own hand across his sweaty forehead. "I'm Will Graham."

"You want him shod," Will motions to a black horse, Hannibal nods.

Will walks around the horse and gently pats it on the rump letting it know he's there, "He's beautiful." His hand runs down the horse's leg and quietly says, "Good boy" as he lifts the hoof.

"He was a wild one, didn't like being touched, he welcomes it now," If Will has heard he gives no indication. Hannibal narrows his eyes as his tongue flicks across slightly parted lips, maybe the Farrier is more polite but he surely couldn't be as beautiful.

"What's his name?" asks the Blacksmith as he straightens the tips of the nails in preparation for breaking the shoe.

"Augustus."

Will continues on cleaning debris from the hoof but Hannibal notices blue eyes fringed with long lashes flick over him from his boots upwards coming to a stop at the tip of his nose.

"Sounds about right," says the Blacksmith without raising his head. Hannibal can almost read the "pompous ass," or some local variation, sounding in Will's head. He should be offended at the manners of a social inferior but he is tolerant of the rough ways of villagers who live on the harsh, untamed land. Most though have a level of deference for his wealth and social position but it seems that this one might not.

Hannibal lapses into silence as he watches Will work his way around Augustus, there is a moment when the Blacksmith is concentrating on securing a shoe in place when he takes the opportunity to fill his nostrils with the man's scent.

"Does my odour offend you?" asks Will, his head only turning slightly.

“Its hard to miss.” And he didn’t miss it the night on the road either, although it was lighter then.

“It comes from hard work which I dare say a fine Gentleman such as yourself would not be accustomed to.”

Hannibal cant help but laugh, “That’s a sharp tongue you have there.”

“So some say.” Will shrugs.

Once Hannibal is on his way again he cannot help but smile, Will is most definitely a puzzle, one which solving will alleviate some of the boredom which plagues his life. The Blacksmith shouldn’t need to take to the road committing robbery, he should have a good income and be well respected maybe even be the Justice of the Peace. He replays the night of the hold up in his mind and Will Graham the Blacksmith could not be the well mannered, confident Highway man, but Hannibal’s nose doesn’t lie. Then there is the matter of the villagers who would seem to shun him, this doesn’t make sense, being ill-tempered is not enough to turn against a master of his craft. And it hadn’t escape Hannibal’s notice the Blacksmith never once looked him in the eye.

That evening as Hannibal sits down to eat he can’t help but feel as if spring, rather than winter, is on its way and his world seems just that little bit more alive.

Chapter End Notes

Just to make it clear Matthew views Will as a big brother, no more and no less

Sorry this is a bit slow going but its the 17th century :-)

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Hannibal visits the Blacksmith again and can't resist winding Will up just a bit

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Over the next two weeks the weather changes, winds restlessly charge through the valley accompanied by endless rain, the paths have turned to mud and a misty greyness hangs where once the sun shone.

During a short reprieve from the rain Hannibal makes his way back to the Smithy. He hasn't returned since his first visit not wanting to seem too eager and possibly alert his prey to the presence of a threat. At least that's what he has told himself but he's not so sure if he isn't a bit wary of Will Graham, though not as an opponent. Its unlikely the man would be a true threat to him in a hunt, if he is then that would be thrilling and if his life was forfeit well the best man won. He has no death wish but a hunt is a hunt and the loser must pay up that's the rules of the game.

He arrives at the entrance to the building still pondering Will Graham, he's done a lot of that lately. There is the unexpected sound of laughter as Hannibal walks through the door and he's just in time to witness a smile on Will's face which, in his opinion, could easily grace a member of the heavenly host. When the Blacksmith and his apprentice see who has entered the smile is replaced by something almost polite. Hannibal is not sure if he feels disappointed that the smile wasn't for him or amused by the man's awkward attempt at a basic social pleasantry, he decides its both.

"I'll finish off here Matthew, you might as well go home," says Will to his apprentice. As the boy leaves he brushes by Hannibal knocking his arm and glaring, a warning from one predator to another, but one too young to be of concern to the much more experienced man.

"What can I help you with?" asks the Blacksmith, at least this time, Hannibal is pleased to see, his presence is acknowledged.

"When I was last here I noticed some knives, you made them?"

"Yeah, my father and his father, and his before him." It's what Hannibal would have expected that the craft of Blacksmithing ran in the blood of the family.

"Can I take a look I am in need of a new knife, my old one was taken." Hannibal closely observes Will's reaction to the statement and he's pleasantly surprised to see that his face gives nothing away.

“Do you make a habit of staring at people?” asks Will peering back at him. Hannibal is caught off guard, but shouldn’t be the Blacksmith is, after all, plain speaking.

Hannibal’s response is to stare for longer, its an opportunity too good to miss, he allows his eyes to examine pink lips and a slender throat which is currently turning a pretty shade of rose. The Blacksmith is beautiful and Hannibal enjoys looking but he can admire something for its beauty and still not blink as he destroys it, so he rules Will’s physical appearance out as the cause of his own wariness of the man. Maybe he just needs to bed him, if the man is amenable that is. He normally maintains a distinction between those he fucks and those he kills, but there are always exceptions to rules.

“Forgive me, you have a bonnier face than most maids I have met. Many with your good looks would have sought their fortune in London, bent their knee to some fine lord in exchange for a pretty cage.”

“My disposition is ill, most cannot stomach my company beyond a few minutes. And I would not lower myself.” The man is angry and it becomes him thinks Hannibal. Then he watches as the emotion which washed over Will so suddenly dissipates just as quickly. The Blacksmith drops his eyes to the knife Hannibal is holding, “My father made that” and then says in a somewhat advisory tone, “You should watch your words, most around here would give you a good beating for what you said.”

“But it seems not you.” It's a possibility the Blacksmith may be amenable to his advances, Hannibal thinks, if he's handled correctly.

The two men look at each other over the small wooden table Will has lain a few knives on.

“I know my place and do not disrespect my betters,” it is said with such apparent sincerity that most would believe it, Hannibal is just glad to see the man’s humour has returned.

Hannibal raises the knife up for inspection, “its a lovely piece your father was highly skilled.”

“He was.”

And just for the sake of his own amusement Hannibal can’t resist raising Will’s ire once more, “I think you would detest the thought of being caged by womanly thighs as much as you would shiny baubles and feather beds.”

“I prefer my own company,” responds Will drawing himself up and for the first time looking Hannibal directly in the eyes, “Do you have business or have you come to mock me.”

“I assure you what I say is not in mockery. I am however in need of a knife and would like you to make one for me to my precise specifications.”

Will takes a deep breath obviously exasperated and Hannibal can only imagine the colourful language circulating in that pretty head, he struggles to repress a smile. “I’ll leave the decision to you, if I do not hear from you I shall not seek you out. If you are prepared to

make me a knife, you are welcome to call by my house, I am in most evenings and we can discuss the details." As he turns to leave he says, "I will pay you handsomely."

Winding Will up and seeing him turn a pretty shade of pink was the most fun Hannibal had had in an afternoon in some time. He'd have to do it again soon, he was in no doubt the Blacksmith would visit the manor house, but the man had his pride so he would expect him in a few weeks time.

Chapter End Notes

That description of the weather is exactly as it is where I live including the muddy paths :-)

In the next chapter Will finally visits Hannibal at home - and their bromance begins :-)

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal figure each other out. Will reckons they can be friends as long as Hannibal doesn't chop him up and put him in a stew.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Closing the door behind him Will steps into the entrance hall of the manor house, he is keenly aware of the thud his boots make on the dark wooden planks covering the floor. He feels an urge, not dissimilar to that he experiences in church, to step lightly and breath quietly so not to disturb his peaceful surroundings. His own house, one room up and one down, could almost fit into the space he is currently standing in. Will feels lucky he does not have to share his home with the eight or so others normally crammed into the small village houses. He could almost envy Hannibal having this all this to himself, except perhaps, rattling around in something so large might make him feel even more alone.

He pokes his head through an open door to his right, it appears to be a sitting room a fire is burning but there is no sign of Hannibal. An unease settles on Will's shoulders, he shouldn't be here, what if Hannibal, the bloody Justice after all, knows it was him who robbed them and then returned the locket. He can rationalises all he wants that getting a good price for a knife, and a few other jobs Hannibal mentioned, will mean he'll almost have the money he needs and he can stop taking to the road sooner than anticipated, but this is dangerous. He thinks it's wise if he puts on his best smile, be polite and try not to mention Abigail.

Finishing his musings Will looks up to find Hannibal stood knife in hand wearing an apron, he's not sure which of those two things he's more surprised at.

"It's good to see you Will. Please come this way," says Hannibal smiling and with a sweep of his arm he beckons Will to follow him.

Conscious that this is not the first time he has walked uninvited into Hannibal's home Will feels the need to apologise, head bowed and arms crossed around himself, he says, " Err, I'm sorry, I wasn't snooping, no one answered when I knocked, I couldn't find you. I've come about the knife you wanted."

"No need to apologise I left the door unbolted in case you came. I'm in the kitchen cooking follow me."

They walk back across the hall, along a passageway and down a flight of stairs.

“You cook? Don’t you have servants for that?” asks Will forgetting for a moment that it may not be polite to ask a Gentleman such a question.

Hannibal gives a little chuff and continues to walk, “I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself and I enjoy preparing the food I eat, even if others might say its women’s work. Don’t you prepare your own food?”

“Yes, otherwise no one else would. I can just about manage pottage.”

They turn a corner and move down three steps into a room Will could happily live in. Hannibal goes to stand behind a large wooden table and recommences his chopping of meat in silence, leaving the Blacksmith to wander round. To the left is a large brick fireplace, a black cauldron sits above a stack of lit firewood, whatever is cooking smells really good. Will's nose is attracted by bread baking behind a small cast iron door set within the fireplace, it makes him feel hungry. At the far end below a window is a cupboard with a display rack containing blue and white porcelain plates, Will decides he’d like a closer look. The plates are really interesting, there are some with long legged birds hidden amongst reeds and others with strange creatures, dragons he presumes, breathing fire. Wherever they were made it was a long way from Will’s village, he’d like to ask but it might turn into a conversation and he’s not come here for that.

“I wanted to thank you for returning the locket.”

Will hears the words and stills, his breath catching in his throat. The arm he was extending, to get a better look at the dragon plate, falls back to his side. Sucking in a breath he turns towards Hannibal “You know it was me on the road.”

“Don’t worry I wont turn you in,” Hannibal continues to chop his vegetables.

Will considers those words before responding, “I know. Your bored and I amuse you,” but the hairs rising on the back of his neck tell him he is still in danger.

“You do I admit, are you offended?”

“Maybe a bit, but I am in need of your coin.”

“Is that all?”

“And your books if you must know.”

“My books,” says Hannibal incredulously, clearly he was not expecting that as an answer.

Will shakes his head feeling insulted, “You think me illiterate, I know my numbers and letters and I didn’t need a fancy tutor to teach me.”

“I’m sorry that wasn’t what I meant. Most people do not show interest in a wealthy man because of his books.”

“Well, its certainly not for your charm.”

“Do you find me charming Will?”

“That’s not what I meant,” says Will flustered, he can feel himself blushing. He doesn’t quite know how to take Hannibal’s polite but flirtatious manner. In an attempt to change the subject he brings up the first thing on his mind, which of course is the last thing he wants to talk about. “So, the girl, Abigail, she liked the whistle.” *Oh fuck.*

“Yes.” The sound of Hannibal chopping stops.

There is only the sound of Wills own breathing as he makes a circuit of the kitchen. He can feel Hannibal’s eyes tracking him, undeterred he picks up items here and there as if he is inspecting them. A knife catches his attention, he takes it in his hand turning it over his eyes squinting slightly as he examines the craftsmanship, “not bad,” Will thinks. He doesn’t return it to its place amongst a set of three.

“Her father used to whistle to her, he was a good father if not a good man.” The knife is secure in Will’s hand, fingers tucked away from a sharp edge, thumb extended towards the handle. He turns and smiles at Hannibal who is standing motionless his head cocked in wordless challenge.

The familiar pressure to speak the truth rises from Will’s chest into his head and spills out through his mouth, “You killed him didn’t you?” Sometimes he wishes he could just keep it in especially now when he can see that Hannibal has already decided exactly how he will kill him. The man is obviously a master of his own craft, Will knows he doesn’t stand a chance.

Hannibal doesn't move, not even a muscle, but Will can feel the pitilessness of the maroon eyes on him. “I know you are a killer and a skilled one,” says Will, the knife in his hand is of little comfort but he resolves to continue, “what I don’t know is why you took the girl.” There is something in the back of his head which murmurs he didn’t kill the girl, he took good care of her, he’s not all bad, he’s not a monster. Words trip over themselves, “Your tastes do not extend to the corruption of babes. You treat her well, not like a father but a fond uncle or older brother. Your protective of her, you’d gladly kill anyone who hurt her. She reminds you of someone, someone you couldn’t protect.”

“What you say is true,” Setting down the knife he was holding Hannibal turns up his palms so Will can see there is nothing in them and steps out from behind the table. “I can see why the locals don’t like you – you see the truth of them, and not just who is having an affair with whom.” At a slow pace Hannibal calmly walks towards Will who cannot help but step backwards as the taller man passes by.

The Blacksmith takes a breath in through his nose, then slowly releases it, he turns his body to keep Hannibal in his sight. “Some still,” the words choking on a dry mouth, Will clears his throat, “some still give me business.”

“Not nearly enough for a man of your skills Will,” says Hannibal turning and showing the two wine glasses he has picked up from a side table, “I think you need a drink.”

A sense of relief comes over Will and searching for normalcy his mind goes towards a row of pots, pans and tins sitting on a shelf too small for them, “you need something to hang those

on."

"What do you suggest."

"A rack, hang it from the ceiling use a pulley system to take it up and down, you could hang herbs and that from it."

"Hmm, yes, that would do."

Will wanders around the kitchen measuring it up in his mind. He turns back towards Hannibal who quickly averts his eyes.

"Were you," Will frowns and lightly blushes, "were you just looking at my ass?"

"Would it matter if I was," says Hannibal with no obvious embarrassment. Will mentally queries if this is the same man who just a few minutes ago looked poised to kill him.

"If we are going to be friends, that will have to stop."

"So we are going to be friends."

Will returns the knife he was holding back where he found it. "I reckon so, as long as you don't chop me up and put me in a stew," he says in jest, well, at least the part about the stew.

Laughter erupts from Hannibal filling the room, "No Will, I wouldn't do that to a friend and as a friend I'd like you to have dinner with me, there is enough for two."

The two men sit across from each other at the kitchen table, eating the stew and bread. Will is pleased to find its as delicious as it smells and he agrees to come back again to share a proper meal with Hannibal, although he's wonders what a 'proper' meal looks like as this is pretty good to him. They talk about the knife Hannibal wants and then discuss making one for Abigail as she like skinning rabbits; Will thinks he might ask Matthew to make it as he'd appreciate a change from horse shoes. He also agrees, reluctantly as it makes him feel a little sick with nerves, to meet with Abigail and tell her about her mother, the girl remembers very little.

Chapter End Notes

1) Honestly I'm not sure how long Hannibal will be able to resist looking at Will's ass.
2) I made Hannibal more direct and flirtatious than originally intended (or then he is in the show) because otherwise these two would have got no where. And Hannibal just sees Will and cant stop himself.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

There are three segments to this chapter - a bit like one of those montages in romantic movies showing the good times before things go wrong (hint) - this chapter shows events in the developing relationship between Will and Hannibal - they also explain some aspects of the plot, for example, how Abigail came to be in Hannibal's care.

Chapter Notes

Will has some thoughts which might be seen as homophobic, but mostly he's a confused 17th century northern English Blacksmith who has some ungodly thoughts about his friend. Will's thoughts are very innocent as he's unworldly in matters of sex as quite frankly the locals don't like him and he's also anti social so he's never been with anyone.

If you are still reading this fic, thanks, and I plan to write two more chapters before posting the two alternate endings. This fic should be complete in the next week or so.

I really struggled in writing this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Long fingers trace the length of a simple hammered metal bookmark left on Hannibal's desk, the slender body curves backwards at the top sweeping downwards before curling up and inwards. The object is a gift for Hannibal left by Will who has become a regular visitor to the manor house, although it is not always to see the owner. On several occasions Hannibal has come home to find the Blacksmith sat, in what he has now begun to think of as 'Will's chair,' reading. Hannibal doesn't mind in the slightest although he does prefer it when Will calls by on an evening and they share a meal and talk into the early hours, these visits, he is pleased to note, are becoming more frequent.

A single book placed on a side table, The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, draws Hannibal's attention. He cant help but wonder if Will finds any significance between this story of damnation and their own relationship, as a God-fearing man it is likely the Blacksmith does, even if he is not aware of it. Will isn't a fast reader, six or so pages at a time, but for a man who has had little access to books he has shown quite an appetite for them. There are other appetites that Hannibal hopes to tempt Will into indulging but that is for the long term.

It was in the kitchen that first night when Hannibal understood why he had been wary of Will. The Blacksmith had 'seen' him, understood him beyond the dichotomy of good and evil and had had the courage to speak of it. When Hannibal had set down the knife, it was because he had realised that in the fullness of time he could share everything with this man and he would willingly bare his soul for Will to read even the dark place where caged children scream. Hannibal welcomed this man and the opportunity he presented but he also felt vulnerable, something he had vowed he would never feel again.

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When the Bluebells start to unfurled in the woods where Hannibal takes his habitual morning walk Abigail is sent for. It is agreed, or rather Will insists, that he accompany Hannibal to the last Coach Inn before the perilous Derbyshire Peaks, the area is renown for its Highway men and cutthroats, and escort the young lady's carriage home. As they set off on their journey the weather is kind to them they ride under a blue and white sky containing no hint of rain, their clothes gather dust and dirt which is preferable to being soaked to the skin. Conscious that Will might feel the burden of constant companionship Hannibal is careful not to be too eager in his attentions and they spend much of their time in an easy silence. It is Will just as much as Hannibal who starts conversations, topics include the French occupation of Egypt, the local flora and fauna and a Carthage military commander by the name of Hannibal. When, as Hannibal always expected he would, the Blacksmith asks how he came to take care of Abigail he simply replies that it would be best to hear from the girl herself and afterwards he would be happy to answer any further questions.

They arrive at the Inn and have only enough time to dismount before Abigail's carriage enters the main yard area. Taking a small bristle brush out of his saddle bag Hannibal sweeps away the layer of dirt from his outerwear, "Do I look presentable," he asks the Blacksmith who very rarely gives thought to such considerations.

"She hasn't seen you for months I don't think she will care about the state of your clothes," replies Will but he takes the brush from Hannibal's hand and gives the man's shoulder's and back a hard scrub anyway. "That's better," and then "just a minute," as he steps a little closer and Hannibal catches his breath at the press of a cold thumb sweeping across his cheek, "you had some dirt. Don't look at me like that or I'll use the brush next time."

Just as Hannibal is about to ask Will how should a man look at someone who all but fluttered his eye lashes at him, Abigail steps out of the carriage. As he strides towards Abigail smiling, he turns briefly eye brow arched at Will – *what do you think you are doing Mr Graham?*

Will wouldn't be able to answer the unasked question as he doesn't know himself, neither is he fully aware of why he feels a sudden pang of jealousy as the girl is enveloped in an embrace. Most onlookers would censure such a public display of affection, but Will finds himself wondering at how it must feel to be cocooned in such tenderness. Will turns away from the picture perfect display of familial affection and goes to stand with Dolly. He doesn't want to think about that little spark of jealousy or being in Hannibal's arms. He tells himself he's disgusting for having such thoughts about a man, its wrong and against God. Hannibal is his friend and he doesn't want to lose that, so he must take a hammer to each unnatural thought and beat it until it is no more.

Once freed from Hannibal's arms Abigail catches Will's eyes and smiles. She makes her way over to him whilst telling her surrogate father that Lady Du Maurier was disappointed that he had sent for her rather than come himself. Over the winter Hannibal had given little thought to the fair Bedelia, he had been far too busy with his new 'toy,' a toy that never really was one. He informs Abigail, with the sound of a chuckle caught in his throat, he is in no doubt that Lady Du Maurier will be able to keep herself well entertained without his presence and he has no plan of seeing her soon.

There are butterflies in Will's stomach as Abigail approaches and all he can think to say is, "You have you mothers eyes."

The girl's face lights up, "It's good me meet you Mr Graham," she says and standing on tiptoes she gives him a peck on the cheek.

"You can call me Will, I really don't mind," he says, blushing slightly as he really isn't used to being kissed, not even on the cheek.

They stay overnight in the Coach Inn setting off at day break, both men ride outside the carriage keeping their eyes out for any signs of trouble. It is about four hours into their journey that Hannibal takes Dolly's reins allowing Will to talk with Abigail in the privacy of the carriage. Over the years Abigail's memories of that day have diminished to just fragments of images and sounds. Sharp white light, a push, a woman's voice shouting 'Hide, Abi, Hide.' Crouching behind a large boulder, out of breath and smiling, hide and seek is one of her favourite games. A scream, preserved down the years in her nightmares. A scrunch of stones under heavy boots, a man kneeling down, "Your mummy asked me to take care of you." She remembers being lifted and a song being hummed but no more. As she grew up Hannibal told her a little more but only so much as he believed was suitable for her age. It had just been a case of right place at the right time, he had been coming over the moors, had seen a child run, a woman turn to face a man, saw as her throat was cut and, as the man headed towards the Abigail's hiding place, he had ridden hard to cut him down. What Abigail knows with complete conviction is Hannibal took her father's life that day but he also saved hers.

When they arrive late at night at the manor house, Hannibal insists Will takes one of the guest bedrooms for the night. The two men share breakfast together in the morning, Abigail is sleeping in after her long journey, and they make plans to meet on Saturday at the Smithy.

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The sun shines on Saturday bringing good light into the Smithy, much better for forging than the dull grey light of early spring. Abigail has been looking forward to seeing her knife being made since Hannibal mentioned it to her, and Matthew who will be making it for her, is intrigued by the well brought up young lady who likes skinning rabbits. Well aware of Matthews reputation as a charmer Will warns him he'll have to be on his best behaviour and he can't flirt with Hannibal's ward the way he does the local girls. As the apprentice leads Abigail around the Smithy, explaining the forging process, Will's eyes burn into Matthews back.

“Will,” says Hannibal with an amused smile, he has had little more than a cursory ‘morning’ from the Blacksmith.

Will looks at his other visitor, “Hmm?” and then returns his attention to Matthew.

“Will, If you are going to monitor Matthew’s every move perhaps you should have made the knife yourself.” Hannibal takes Will by the arm, gives him a little tug and leads him to the other side of the building. Ignoring some solid, comfortable looking chairs Will perches himself on the edge of a table at just the right height to have a clear view of his apprentice.

“I am sure your apprentice is trustworthy Will, and besides, he is well aware of who he would have to deal with if he is inappropriate with Abigail,” says Hannibal who wants a conversation with Will and not an occasional inattentive nod.

It takes a little time but Will finally realises that he is being quite rude to his friend, “Sorry Hannibal, yes he is and I suppose he does. He’ll be a good Blacksmith one day soon.” Will turns his attention to Hannibal looking him up and down, “You have the physique for being a Blacksmith. My dad used to say I was too scrawny.”

Hannibal eyes twinkle as he says, “I do, do I?” the tone of his voice noticeably lower, it sends a shiver down Will’s back.

The Blacksmith closes his eyes and takes in a breath, he pictures a nail and starts to hammer it in place. He checks where Abigail and Matthew are and looks at Hannibal, “Its probably all those bodies you carry,” he says. He meant to say it with an air of dismissal but from the look he gets from Hannibal Will concludes, to his horror, it must have come out more flirtatiously. The Blacksmith shakes his head internally at himself, he must be the one at fault because Hannibal is only responding to what he is saying, if only he was a better communicator or maybe he’s just misinterpreting everything. With a sinking feeling he knows this conversation is only going to get worse, he desperately wants to rescue himself from it but he doesn’t know how to do it politely, would it be rude if he just picked up a hammer and started hitting something.

A high pitched laugh from Abigail provides Will with an opportunity to break away from Hannibal, he stands, thanks God, and makes to head for the furnace,

“Leave them be, they’re fine,” says Hannibal giving Will’s arm a light touch, “there is something I want to mention. The village drunk accosted me the other day.”

“Jack,” Will doesn’t like the description given to a good man who had fallen on hard times.

“Yes, Jack, he told me something of what happened all those years ago,” Hannibal is all seriousness now, the previous flirtations forgotten. “I’d like to hear it from you, if you don’t mind.”

“I was a kid who couldn’t keep his mouth shut” says Will, he really does mind but Hannibal’s is his only real friend, he curls into himself his finger unconsciously scratching at his lower lip.

“He said you predicted what Hobbs would do, you told him and others, he didn’t listen.”

“Hobbs was well respected, a church warden and when what happened, happened, a good number of folk said I must have caused it, I’d sent an evil spirit into him. That I should hang as a witch.”

“Ah, Jack mentioned something but he wasn’t clear. They didn’t hang you though.” Its not the most tactful thing to say but Hannibal is curious.

“No,” says Will, he remembers how terrified he’d been, the villagers gathering outside his house shouting, ‘hang the witch,” his father stood with a hammer threatening anyone who moved, the crowd gaining in confidence with each new person who joined. He would have been ripped from his house if the local Lord hadn’t come down himself, “his lordship said witchcraft was nonsense and he’d hang anyone who tried. I owe him my life such as it is.” What Will didn’t say was he himself had thought, sometimes still thought, it made sense he must be touched by the devil as no one else could do what he did and he had other thoughts, brutal thoughts, no good Christian should.

“His lordship is a wise man. Jack didn’t believe it either, he said you didn’t use magic you were just unique and ordinary folk fear what they can’t understand.” Hannibal adds, “He wishes he’d believed in you sooner.”

Will nods, “Jack’s a good man it hit him hard after his wife died, now there was true love. The villagers take care of him, make sure he has a bed and food in his belly.” He's still scratching at his lip a little red wound appearing.

“They take better care of him then they do you,” Hannibal says, his mouth flaring in disgust at the villagers.

“They don’t believe he is a witch,” says Will without anger. “In the old days Blacksmiths were hung in these parts for witchcraft, a dark art they called it, it was banned in many of the villages around here. There are those who would still see me hung, but not for metal working.”

In that moment Will’s defences are down and Hannibal is able to see him, “Ah, you believe you are destined to hang.” Hannibal shakes his head not understanding the reason but knowing Will believes he deserves such an end. “It is not your fate Will,” he wants to set fire to such thoughts and extinguish them so they trouble Will no more, “we make our own way in this world, not God and not the devil.”

Will is rocking backwards and forwards a little, his voice breaking as he says, “Hannibal, I do not wish to talk about this anymore.”

Hannibal feels angry with himself, a rare experience, he has let his curiosity get out of control and has mishandled this. He wants to take Will in his arms and comfort him but he knows that would probably make things worse. He looks over at Matthew and Abigail both are engrossed in the work of making the knife, good, he needs time for Will to recover before they notice his state.

“OK Will,” Hannibal says, sitting forward in his chair showing he is there for his friend without trying to take over the space between them.

They sit in silence, it is a while before Will speaks, he takes in a deep breath, his shoulders rise, “Your a good friend Hannibal.”

Hannibal gets up and stands next to Will, he places his hand on his shoulder, he wants to ask Will to stop robbing, it only plays into the hands of locals who would see him hang but it can wait for another time.

Chapter End Notes

1) They hung rather than burned people for witchcraft in England
2) The last official hanging of a 'witch' was 1682 - this story is set in 1698-99, so well within living memory and I suspect locals would still take things into their own hands even if the state had moved away from a belief in Witchcraft - for any one a bit nerdy like me the witchcraft laws were repealed in England in 1736
3) They did indeed hang Blacksmiths for witchcraft in medieval times
4) I'm English hence why the weather is mentioned a lot in this fic :)
5) Thinking about this i should have written a murder in this chapter, Hanni killing a villager who called Will a witch and then, when Will is face to face with blood, death and gore he has to decide if he's ok with it (which he would be after some angst) but i want to stick with original plan (and wrap this up asap.)
6) Having a rethink, its likely the next chapter will have less angst and more fluff than originally intended with Will agreeing to go away with Hannibal (rather than rejecting him before changing his mind, partially because it means I have less to write) but the law does catch up with Will before, ending one - fluffy happy ending or ending two Major Character Death - both endings are pretty much written just need editing - I will, I will, I will finish this and never write a multi chapter above 3 chapters again
7) strangely enough i do have a story in mind where the Highway man is a past life of Will Graham FBI agent in a wendigo/soulmates fic

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Hannibal is very persuasive in convincing Will to go away with him

Chapter Notes

Yesterday I said two chapters until the endings but I decided the story wouldn't lose anything by removing the rejection, by Will of Hannibal, I had initially planned. I think this work just as well, (I hope)

Thanks to GulliverJ for their message, otherwise I might very well have abandoned this.

Writer update 2/6/16 - I'm going to rewrite this chapter over the next few weeks just for my own satisfaction, I wrote it far too quickly just to get this finished - I will likely stick with the overall content but its needs more psychological and emotion POV from both Hannibal and Will

I have no beta so there will be mistakes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will sits twiddling with the string on the collar of his shirt. He is sat in Hannibal's study on an armchair, he'd never sat in such a chair before he started coming to the manor, the padding on the seat and back rest means he can read for hours and not have his bum or back ache. They now spend many an evening together Hannibal helping Will to build a memory palace, his is pretty rudimentary but he'd included one, well two, of these chairs positioned near the fire in the front room of the little house he is constructing. Hannibal's memory palace was vast, full of rooms with object d'art he'd seen on his travels, music he'd heard, food he'd tasted. It was lacking in people, except a little sister Hannibal occasionally spoke about and Will, Will was fairly certain he was also being stored in a room somewhere. Sometimes he caught Hannibal looking at him, his eyes running down the curve of his neck or the length of his arm committing its exact measurements to memory. He's sure he must look just as out of place in Hannibal's ostentatious palace as he does sat in his richly decorated study with its beautifully veneered walnut writing desk and matching cabinets. The furniture positively gleams and Will wonders how Hannibal manages to keep everything so pristine and smudge free. Will particularly likes the grandfather clock, it stands in a corner of the room and demands his attention. To the Blacksmith it is the most beautiful thing in the study, possibly the whole house and sometimes he opens the casing just to stare at the intricacy of the face and the mechanism behind it. The pendulum, the way it sweeps from left to right is the image

Will uses to clear his mind of the real world, it had been Hannibal's idea and it works very well. At first when memory palaces had been mentioned Will had thought it a nonsensical idea something for rich men with idle hands, surely no one needs to conjure up a palace to remember things. Rather than taking offence Hannibal had admitted it might seem a little ridiculous but it could have many different purposes including a refuge for Will, somewhere to store dreams and retreat to when dealing with people became too much. Although he'd never admit to it, Will had recently started taking Hannibal apart, watching how his clothing hung on his shoulders, hearing the way his voice lowered just a little when they talked together and the length of his strides when he was in a hurry, and putting him back together again in his house. Hannibal always seems too big for Will's memory house, not capable of being confined under the roof but instead breaking through it and reaching to the sky, a palace did seem much more fitting.

Hannibal hands Will a glass of wine, something else the Blacksmith had never tasted before his friendship with the wealthy Gentleman. It was quite spicy and warming and Will had come to enjoy it, he would miss it when Hannibal left but not as much as he'd miss the man himself. It had been a month since Hannibal had mentioned his plans, he said he had come to dislike this quiet place with its hardworking but intolerant people and wanted a fresh start elsewhere, another country even. As each day passed Will's chest grew tighter and his life seemed that little bit more cold, he'd always have memory palace Hannibal but it would not be the same.

Will sat, drumming his fingers on the armrest willing himself to ask his friend if he could perhaps keep a book or something small of his when he left. Did that make him seem like some daft love sick girl, he wondered, was it something a grown man should ask of another. He does have the knife but he'd like something from their time together rather than something he stole.

"Will is there something on your mind?" asks Hannibal.

"Err, No" Will says forcing his foot to stop tapping on the wood flooring.

"Good, there is something I want to discuss with you." Hannibal shifts his position slightly, getting comfortable. Will thinks he might be in for a lengthy and possibly fraught conversation.

"I'd like you to stop taking to the roads."

Will blinks and breathes in noticeably, he wasn't sure what to expect but this wasn't it, and it really isn't Hannibal business. He looks at his friend then breathes out and attempts to contain the annoyance fermenting in his gut, he can see the concern in the man's eyes.

"I almost have the money I need and then I'll stop," Will says, its not the biting comment which had first come to mind.

"Chilton the new Justice, he's an educated and intelligent man but he has a foolish belief in witchcraft. If he listens to the villagers, and they *will* talk to him," Hannibal pauses after will emphasising that it is a certainty, "he will come after you. Don't give them the excuse, his

Lordship and parliament wont let them hang you for a witch but as a Highway man they will."

"I just want some land and a house, somewhere a way from everyone. So I don't have to listen to the neighbours telling their children never to look directly at a witch."

"There is a solution," says Hannibal leaning forward in his chair, "you could come with me."

"Oh," says Will a bit startled, he definitely wasn't expecting that.

Hannibal smiles benignly as if he'd just ask Will if he wanted another glass of wine, "You have no one keeping you here, you could give the Smithy to Matthew and leave with me in a few days."

Will frowns, "Why, why would you want me to go with you?" it comes out a bit more hesitant then he'd intended.

"Your a friend and I don't want the ignorance of others to cost you your life."

"And there is no other reason," asks Will his voice sharper than before.

"What other reason could there be," a smile never wavering from Hannibal's lips as the man sat opposite looks ever more tense and hostile.

"I've seen the way you look at me, its how a man should look at a woman, its unnatural," Will stands up from the chair, clenching his fists as he walks over to the fire turning his back on Hannibal.

"I suspect that any lustful look or touch, no matter who it was from would feel unnatural to you. When were you last touched?"

"That is none of your concern." Will can feel his heart rate speeding up, he glances at the door he has a sudden urge to bolt through it. He didn't hear Hannibal move, but he can feel him now, to the back of him a few inches away.

"No one touches a witch Will. It would be, ungodly," Will can just about hear the chuckle in Hannibal's throat and he can't help but freeze as a hand comes gently to rest on the curve between his neck and shoulder.

"This is ungodly," says Will not daring to turn.

Hannibal must have leaned in, Will can feel his breath on his neck, " And I have seen the way you look at me, I'm sure you have thought about my touch in that cold bed of yours."

"Its against God and you must stop this." It comes out a bit too pleading, Will can't help but feel he sounds like prey, helpless.

"Do you think God cares if I touch you here," says Hannibal as he moves his free hand to fit snugly on Will's hipbone. "Where was God when a group of adults wanted to hang a child,

hmm. Where was he when those Blacksmith's went to their deaths, do think they were witches?"

"No," says Will shaking his head, he's feeling hot and dizzy with Hannibal so close whispering in his ear.

"Where was God when hundreds of women up and down this country were condemned as witches, do you think they deserved their fates?"

Will turns his head slight towards Hannibal, "No, no, I don't," he's pretty sure the man's hands are the only thing stopping him sliding to the floor.

Soft lips touch his cheek, before he is turned towards a firm chest, "Clever boy," a hand runs through his curls, petting him, "tomorrow you'll pack what you want from your home and come here, I'll expect you in the evening, we'll leave in a few days."

Will nods.

.....

Matthew comes crashing through the door of Will's little house. The Blacksmith freezes he knows what this means.

"It's Chilton, he means to arrest you as a highway man, you must leave now," shouts Matthew out of breath.

Will drops the bag he was packing, his adrenaline flowing he quickly thinks, "Ok, you go home now Matthew. I'll get Dolly and ride to Hannibal's." He's out of the door in no time, heading to the field whistling for his horse. She comes galloping to him sensing his urgency.

"If you get on that horse my men and I will shoot her from under you," says Chilton emerging from the dark into view.

Will stops, hands in the air, there is nothing he can do. He takes a step towards Chilton, feels a punch to the stomach, he falls to his knees, someone says "Witch" as they deliver a blow to his head.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is a happy ending

The Ship

Chapter Summary

this is the first ending (Chapter 10 is an alternate i.e. sad ending)

An escape - happy ending, there might even be a kiss

Its short, fluffy and a bit daft :)

Chapter Notes

No smut, can't write it, sorry

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes up, he's on a narrow bed with a thin mattress beneath him, he's in a small space he cant focus properly but there's a distorted human shape, it takes a while before it becomes clear.

"Its you, I, I thought, when, when they came for me, I was sure to swing" says Will his hand going to his neck.

There is a scrape as a chair is pulled up besides the bed and Hannibal sits, legs crossed, slightly leaning forward. From the circles under his eyes and his unkempt hair it's evident he's not slept.

"You must instruct your mind to turn away from such thoughts," he says softly but his gaze intense and authoritative.

Will shifts himself up to sit with his back against the wooden wall, his eyes fix on Hannibal's face *is it really you, are we really here*, *is this real,* he finally says "I can't believe I'm here with you."

"How?"

"I was in the right place at the right time."

"You make a habit of that."

"What can I say except God favours me," says Hannibal with a grin one Will would like to kiss from his face but instead he averts his eyes and dips his head.

“Who set them onto me?”

“Bedelia, she is a beautiful, wealthy woman and she whispered in the right ears.”

“I took something which she thought belonged to her.” Says Will referring to the man sat opposite him.

“Yes, nods Hannibal, “You have nothing to worry about, you are safe and bound for the new world, we will carve a place for ourselves there.”

“Somewhere with a wood, a stream and animals.”

“Yes, I have plenty of resources and we are both strong and healthy we can make this work, it will be quite the adventure.” Inside Will’s chest there is a warmth and a fluttering, he’s not sure what it is but it makes him want to smile, maybe its happiness.

“Can I...Will you, will you let me touch your sleeve, I need to make sure this is real and not some fevered dream.”

Hannibal raises himself from the chair and moves forward a smile never leaving his face. Knees come to a stop against the edge of the bed, he holds his breath and carefully extends his arm. The younger man lets his fingers glide against the cotton, he takes a small amount between his thumb and forefinger and rubs; a noise leaves his throat something between a sob and a laugh.

Compelled forward Hannibal finds himself kneeling on the mattress. Will stills and tilts his head to look up at Hannibal, two sets of eyes hold each other searching for boundaries, the catch in Will’s throat is audible.

Hannibal hand slowly reaches forward and touches a strand of Will’s hair with the sort of breathless devotion normally lavished on saint’s relics. The other hand once again finds the curve where Will’s neck meets his shoulder. He pauses momentarily looking Will in the eye and finding no reproach presses his lips to the younger man, then withdraws slowly until he is sitting back on his haunches, “ls that alright with you Will?” The noise of the ship quietens until there is just the sound of two men breathing, Will reaches out a hand and with one finger pushes aside white cotton fabric and skims the line of Hannibal’s collar bone, “more” he breathes soft and low.

“Greedy boy”, Hannibal chuckles before coming forward again, this time his inner thigh grazes Will and they feel their shared warmth. His head moves forward once again taking position a hair breadth from Will’s mouth. There’s a turn of a handle and Hannibal jerks back, “Damn it”

Abigail comes running into the room, "Its so good to see you Will," she says pushing Hannibal out the way and kissing him on the cheeks. From above Abigail's brown hair Will can see Matthew entering the room. The apprentice looks from Will to Hannibal and grins, "Hello Will, come on Abi, I think these two have much to discuss."

"I'll be back later" says Abigail as she follows Matthew outside. Will raises an eyebrow at Hannibal.

"Don't worry, I made them wed. They'll be a good match able to understand each other in ways no one else could."

"Now what were we doing before we were interrupted?" says Hannibal once again joining Will on the small bed.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter - this is an alternate ending! you do not need to read it

Major character death, Public Execution, Hanging, NON GRAPHIC

the Gallows

Chapter Summary

Don't know how to summarise this except Public execution of a Highway man - I have tried to be sensitive

There are some Hannigram moments and use of the memory palace, and Winston has a cameo

Chapter Notes

I never intended to write this but when I researched and read stuff including that most highway men ended their short live at the Gallows, I sort of couldn't help myself. This was really hard - I am not an experienced writer but I did my best.

Its non graphic because I wouldn't be able to write that.

I did write more for this chapter but decided just to go for the main event

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Morning comes soon enough, Will has sat all night with the priest immersing his mind in the rhythm and repetition of prayer. He keeps glancing at the window above where he kneels, finding it harder and harder to tear his eyes away as he watches the subtle changes of the sky as dawn breaks across the valley. A tightness settles in his chest and throat at the thought that it's the last he will ever see. He tracks a flock of birds as they fly across his field of vision and cant help wondering where they are going, not that it really matters.

Will is transported to the gallows on a cart, his wrists bound at the front and a second cord passed around his body and arms at the elbows. Its slow progress but in the distance he can see a large crowd has already assembled and just beyond them is the gallows. A few locals line the route, some shout "I'll pray for you," and others, "You was always a bad un." Even though Will feels he has lived his whole live under the shadow of the noose its still a shock to see the timber structure erected just for him, he is unable to take his eyes of it. Some men come to this place with a swagger and a joke on their lips, others struggle and curse until their last breath. Will knows he will do neither, he will go quietly it was always going to end this way and soon all this will be over and the Blacksmith finds some comfort in that. The priest offers comfort in the best way he can, "God will be merciful," but it's not so much meeting his maker that the Blacksmith fears more the sea of humanity with their eyes on him.

The scene before Will could be straight out of his very nightmares, its just before noon and the crowd is already rowdy, spilling out of the public houses who'll be seeing brisk trade today. Its Wednesday, market day and from all around people have left their homes, scattered across the wild, steep slopes of the valley, and gathered in the village to buy and sell produce. They also take the opportunity to meet friends and exchange gossip and before noon they gather near the gallows and watch a Highwayman be executed. It's nothing personal, Will knows that, death is a common occurrence and it can not be avoided. Many who come to gawp have hardly taken the time to mourn the passing of their own children so who can blame them if they treat the execution of a stranger as little more than entertainment.

Matthew, Jack and a small group of his regular customers stand at the front of the crowd, close to the gallows. When Will steps down from the cart he feels hands, in small acts of comfort, clasp his shoulder, he doesn't turn to look at them but says a quiet 'thank you,' in acknowledgement of what they have come to do. He searches for Hannibal and finds him standing alone slightly set back from the spectators. Eyes solemn in their grief lock onto Will's, no tears are shed, just a whispered smile. Unlike many here Will knows he has truly been loved, a fragile thing in this world and at least he will never have to feel it shatter, that would be far too painful. He imagines the grandfather clock in Hannibal's study, the solid pendulum wiping away time with each swing. With each motion of the pendulum there are fewer bodies before him, the noise becomes less troubling until there is just him and Hannibal and a glimpse of what might have been, *of long fingers entwined in curls, of a hot mouth on pale skin, the taste of the other lingering on his tongue.*

There is a light touch to Will's shoulder and the clergy man, who has been with him these last three days and nights, beckons him to kneel and say the Lord's Pray. Will tries to pray but the tightness in his throat makes it difficult to even mumble, from amongst the crowd he hears the occasional shout of "witch" and "hanging is too good for him." So he breathes and lets his body go, *he's standing at a door, its not grand just an ordinary wooden door, his hand circles a handle and he pushes*.

A small man with well developed shoulder muscles quickly climbs the ladder, Will is turned so his back lies against the rungs, hands latch under his armpits and haul him up, he feels the rope slipped around his neck and tightened. There is a slight scratch to his neck then before he can take a steadying breath the ladder is pushed and nothing is under his feet except air and there is a very great pain, a flash of glaring light before his eyes then he loses all sense of pain. *He's walking, the breeze in his hair, a mucky blondish sort of dog runs ahead turning it looks at him with the soft adoration of a well loved pet its tail wagging as they head towards the stream. There's a figure waiting there*.

He doesn't see the crowd surge forward to get a better view, he doesn't feel Matthew, Jack, and others, latch onto his legs and pull, *he just takes the outstretched hand, feels the warmth of a palm and fingers entwined in his.*

.....

Such is the vagaries of human beings that when the villagers return to their homes some will talk of the man who went to his death calmly with a smile on his face, giving Will Graham in death the respect they refused in life. Others in taverns up and down the county will raise

their cups to the Highwayman, a brave and handsome fellow, a man of the people who dared to raise a gun to the rich and powerful and swung for it.

.....

A grave is dug under a tree on the grounds of Hannibal's Manor House. After Will was taken and bribery could not buy his freedom he knew he could not live anywhere else but close to where his beautiful boy was laid to rest.

.....

Chapter End Notes

1) Hannibal ensured that Bedelia had her neck broken soon after Will died
2) Villagers began to mysteriously die :)
3) in due time Hannibal was buried next to Will by Abigail and Matthew - who had a child who looked suspiciously like Will (reincarnation!)
4) The brief description of Wills experience of being hung is based upon a 18th century man 'John Smith' who survived a public hanging at Tyburn– capitalpunishmentuk.org

a little bit about hanging below - just relevant to the why Matthew and Jack pull at Wills legs

In this time the short drop was used - people would be strangled by the rope rather than have their neck broken, it could take quite some time to die - friends and family would pull on the persons legs to hasten death.

End Notes

I am not an historian and have only read things on google but I am trying to give a feel of 17th century lives but as this is a fic I depart from how reality would have been when I see fit. For example a husband beating his wife was, apparently, tolerated or even expected so I'm not sure a 17th century Will would have found it that odious, but our Will with his abundance of empathy would.

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